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ABSTRACT

This study examined the background characteristics and previous inter-institutional movements of a sample of multiple-transfers enrolled at a large, urban, public university. The study evaluated a random sample of 424 students from a population of 906 undergraduate students who transferred to the university in Fall 1989 and who had previously attended two or more postsecondary institutions. Primary data were obtained through a questionnaire using variables previously found to be related to college choice, student persistence and transfer behavior. Secondary data were provided by the university's official records along with academic and demographic data on first-time freshmen and transfers for comparison. Results of the study suggested that multiple transfer students tend to possess the same demographic, academic and motivational attributes that characterize college persisters. Most chose and also left institutions because of the quality and/or variety of their academic programs. Rather than resulting from poor choice, the behavior of students in the multiple transfer sample appeared to be due in part to students' earlier conscious selection of lower-choice, less selective community colleges and public 4-year institutions. Included are 1 table, 1 figure, and 79 references. (JB)

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THE GYPSY STUDENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION: BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS AND INTERINSTITUTIONAL MOVEMENTS OF A MULTIPLE TRANSFER POPULATION

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ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Park Plaza Hotel & Towers in Boston, Massachusetts, October 31-November 3, 1991. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

ABSTRACT

No research has been conducted on "gypsy" students who transfer more than once during their collegiate careers. In this study, background characteristics and previous interinstitutional movements of a sample of multiple-transfers enrolled at a large, urban, public university were examined. These students moved along four different transfer paths before enrolling at the subject university, where they comprised one-fifth of new undergraduate enrollments. The paths differed significantly from one another on a number of student, institutional and interaction variables. Overall, these students were academic achievers with high socioeconomic status backgrounds, who focused on academic quality and programs in choosing four-year colleges. Their tendency to transfer among large, inexpensive, public institutions has negative implications for the private sector of higher education.

The Gypsy Student in Higher Education: Background Characteristics and Interinstitutional Movements of a Multiple Transfer Population

Numerous studies completed during the past three decades have confirmed the growth and significance of the transfer student population in American colleges and universities (Anderson, 1983, 1984; Knepper, 1989; Peng, 1977, 1978; State of Illinois Board of Higher Education, 1990). Today, 34 percent of full-time, entering freshmen to the two-year and four-year sectors leave their original institution after one year (Noel, Levitz, Saluri & Assoc., 1987) and only one-third of undergraduate degree recipients graduate from the institution at which they first matriculate (U.S. Department of Education, 1986). Data from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 indicate that 56 out of every 100 freshmen entering the four-year college sector leave their first institution without receiving a degree, 44 percent within two years of matriculation. Of these departures within two years, 42 percent transfer to another higher education institution; 14 percent stop out (leave for a time and then re-enroll or transfer to another college); and the remainder drop out completely from the system of higher education (Tinto, 1987). In the two-year college sector, approximately 73 percent of the entering students leave their first institution without receiving a degree. Of these departures, 42 percent transfer to other institutions within two years. The vast majority of these (81 percent) transfer to four-year colleges or universities (Tinto, 1987).

While the transfer population is clearly a significant one in higher education, existing research on transfer students is

extremely narrow in focus. Most studies have been limited to single institutions or geographical areas and have therefore failed to analyze the factors involved in student transfer from one college to another. Much of the research on transfer students was conducted during the 1960s and 1970s, and is sorely in need of updating. The bulk of these studies has examined the experiences, background characteristics, academic performance and persistence of community college students who transfer to four-year institutions. All of the studies have concentrated upon first-time transfers who have moved from their original college or university to a second institution.

Common to national, state and institutional studies is the aggregate presentation of data, which makes it impossible to track the transfer movements of individual students or to distinguish transfers from dropouts. This results in a gross overstatement of attrition rates and understatement of transfer rates (Gilbert & Gomme, 1986; Lenning et al., 1980; Metzner, 1984; Noel et al., 1987; Tinto, 1987). Included in these data are a substantial number of "gypsy" students who transfer not just once, but several times during the course of their collegiate careers (Kearney, 1988; Kuznik, 1972; Trent & Ruyle, 1965). Although no studies describe the multiple transfer student or the movements of this population, the large numbers of multiple transfers moving among colleges and universities today hold important implications for the students themselves, the institutions they transfer among, and the system of American higher education.

In moving among many different institutions, multiple transfer students may extend the time period required to earn the

baccalaureate degree. This may have the effect of increasing the cost of these students' college education and delaying their early occupational attainment. On the other hand, multiple transfers are able to experience a variety of different institutional settings and curricula. Transferring may actually lower the overall cost of a college education for multiple transfer students who attend community colleges or public four-year institutions for substantial periods of time. Perhaps most important of all, transferring offers the potential for improving student-institution fit, thus enhancing persistence within the system of higher education (Cope & Hannah, 1975; Noel et al., 1987; Tinto, 1987) and increasing the likelihood of degree attainment (Carroll, 1989; Knepper, 1989).

This study attempts to broaden existing knowledge of the transfer phenomenon through an examination of the characteristics and interinstitutional movements of multiple transfer students within the system of higher education.

Theoretical Framework

While no body of literature describes the multiple transfer student, several streams of research were brought together to provide a theoretical framework for this study. The literature on student persistence, college choice and transfer behavior contains a number of overlapping variables and concepts. Congruency or incongruency between the student and institution has been shown to interrelate with student expectations, college choice and persistence (Cope & Hannah, 1975; Hossler, 1984; Peng,

1977; Williams, 1984). In addition, various student and institutional attributes have been linked to initial college choice, transfer behavior and withdrawal from the system of higher education. Among these are institutional characteristics such as size, selectivity, type, control, academic program variety, class size, quality of teaching, and social life; individual factors such as educational aspiration, academic achievement and ability, socioeconomic status and parental education level; and interaction characteristics such as student expectations of the college environment and student satisfaction (Astin, 1975; Astin et al., 1987; Bean, 1982; Brigman et al., 1982; D. Chapman, 1981; Hossler, 1984; Hossler et al., 1989; Johnson, 1987; Kotler & Fox, 1985; Lenning et al., 1980; Lenning, 1982; Litten et al., 1983; Peng, 1977; Richardson & Bender, 1987; Tinto, 1975; 1987; Velez & Javalgi, 1987; Williams & Stage, 1989; Wisner, 1984).

While Bean's (1982) and Tinto's (1975, 1987) theoretical models can account for some of the factors involved in a student's decision to transfer from an institution, they do not address the factors which might attract the student to a subsequent college or university. However, the theory-based models developed to describe the college choice process (D. Chapman, 1981; Hossler, 1984; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Kotler & Fox, 1985) have been shown to apply to first-time transfer students (Becker, 1988; Smith, 1987). Multiple transfer students experience the choice and attrition cycle several times over the course of their collegiate careers, and are ultimately persisters within the system of higher education. A study of this population, therefore, may be a valuable tool for bringing together theory and its prac-

tical application in the areas of student persistence and college choice.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine individual and institutional factors influencing past choice and withdrawal behaviors of multiple transfer students who enrolled at a large, public, urban, midwestern university in fall 1989. A multiple transfer student was defined as an individual who attended and received transfer credit from two or more colleges or universities prior to enrolling at the subject institution. This was a descriptive, exploratory study which had the following objectives: 1) to identify demographic and academic background variables, goals and aspirations of these students; 2) to discover the most common interinstitutional enrollment/transfer patterns of this population; and 3) to delineate these students' self-reported reasons for leaving (transferring from) and choosing (transferring to) previous institutions attended.

Method and Data Analyses

The population for this study was the group of 906 undergraduate students who transferred to a large, urban, public research university in fall 1989 and who had previously attended two or more postsecondary institutions. This group of students constituted 44 percent of the university's incoming transfer population and 19 percent of the entering undergraduate population. A sample consisting of 453 subjects was randomly selected from the 906 entering multiple transfer students to participate in the study. The sample was later adjusted to include 424 multiple

transfer students due to institutional record-keeping errors which misclassified some individuals.

Both primary and secondary data were collected to describe the sample population. Secondary data on all 424 students in the sample were drawn from the university's official records. This information included students' age, sex and ethnicity; the names of all previous postsecondary institutions attended; dates of attendance and transfer credits earned at each institution. Secondary data also included the college of the subject university in which each student was enrolled (e.g., College of Business; College of Liberal Arts and Sciences); the number of credit hours for which the student was enrolled in fall 1989; the class each student was in upon matriculation (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior or senior); the cumulative grade point average earned for the fall 1989, winter 1990 and spring 1990 academic quarters; and whether or not the student was enrolled at the subject university for each of those quarters. For comparison purposes, the subject university provided academic and demographic data on first-time freshmen and transfers who completed an institutional survey in fall 1989.

Using the Carnegie Foundation's A Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (1987), The College Board's The College Handbook 1989-90, and U.S. News and World Report's America's Best Colleges (1990), the researcher identified institutional type; control; Carnegie classification; location by state; average tuition/fee and enrollment levels; and average ACT scores of the entering student body (used as a selectivity measure) for each institution attended by students in the sample. For those

colleges that published only average SAT scores, these scores were transformed into average ACT scores using conversion tables developed by Astin (1971).

Primary data were obtained through a researcher-designed questionnaire using variables previously found to be related to college choice, student persistence and transfer behavior. Variable categories included student background characteristics; attitudinal, environmental and interaction characteristics; and institutional characteristics. **Student background variables** included 1) marital status; 2) parental education levels; 3) previous postsecondary degree(s) earned; 4) high school program; 5) high school class rank; 6) high school grade point average; 7) religious preference; 8) student/parental income level; and 9) employment situation.

Attitudinal, environmental and interaction characteristics included 1) educational goal commitment (intention to earn an advanced degree); 2) institutional commitment (intention to earn a degree from a specific institution); 3) level of student satisfaction with each institution attended; 4) degree of support received from faculty or staff at each institution; 5) choice ranking given to each institution (e.g., first, second, third or fourth); and 6) entering student expectations of the subject university.

Institutional variables included 1) academic quality; 2) variety of courses and programs offered; 3) class size; 4) faculty teaching ability; 5) faculty availability outside the classroom; 6) availability of financial aid and scholarships;

7) affordability of tuition and fees; 8) convenience of campus location; 9) attractiveness of campus facilities and grounds; 10) social atmosphere; 11) availability of student support services (e.g., advising, counseling and career planning); and 12) fairness of campus rules and regulations.

Survey questions were designed to elicit respondents' reasons for transferring to and from their previous colleges or universities in terms of various institutional characteristics, using a Likert or summated rating scale format. The survey instrument was analyzed for content validity by experts in the fields of college choice, persistence and survey research. The instrument was also pilot tested on ten multiple transfer students who entered the subject university in fall 1988. Results of the pilot tests and interviews indicated that the survey had high face validity. Dillman's Total Design Method for mail surveys (1978) was used to guide the design, printing and mailing of the questionnaires. The initial mailing was followed by a reminder postcard and a repeat mailing to nonrespondents.

Results

Characteristics of the Multiple Transfer Sample

Of the 424 multiple transfer students in the sample, 275 returned completed, useable surveys for a response rate of 65 percent. Demographic and academic comparisons as computed using the SAS program indicated nonsignificant differences between the sample and the population of multiple transfer students who entered the subject university in fall 1989. Chi-square analysis

revealed only minimal differences between respondents (n=275) and nonrespondents (n=149), implying a low response bias.

The majority of multiple transfers in the sample were white (66 percent), traditional age (18 to 22) (57 percent), and single (84 percent); had attended college preparatory high schools (81 percent), attained high school grade point averages in the B- to A- range (69 percent) and ranked in the top or second quarter of their high school class (71 percent); had college-educated fathers (64 percent); possessed high educational aspirations (plans to earn an advanced degree) (84 percent); were enrolled full-time (78 percent) and were classified as sophomores or juniors at the subject university (75 percent); and were employed 20 or fewer hours per week while enrolled at the subject university (64 percent). Students in the multiple transfer sample had an extremely wide range of family incomes, with the highest concentration of dependent survey respondents in the $70,000 and over income category (23 percent). Their high socioeconomic status backgrounds, in particular, distinguished the multiple transfer students from entering freshmen and first-time transfers at the subject university.

Although the multiple transfers exhibited varying degrees of institutional commitment to their previous colleges, respondents in the sample evidenced high institutional commitment upon matriculating at the subject university. In addition, students in the sample were found to possess high levels of goal commitment, or aspiration to earn an advanced degree. The multiple transfers' high goal commitment, but relatively low institutional commitment to colleges attended prior to their enrollment at the

subject university, is consistent with earlier research on first-time transfer students (Getzlaf et al., 1984; Hackman & Dysinger, 1970).

One-way analysis of variance indicated that students in the sample who had transferred among four or more colleges prior to enrolling at the subject university were significantly more likely to be older (F (5, 416) = 8.677, p< .0000) and married (F (5, 265) = 7.560, p< .0000) than those who had attended only two previous institutions. In addition, students who had attended three or more prior colleges were significantly more likely to have attained senior status at the subject university than those who had transferred twice (F (5, 418) = 3.244, p< .0069). Students who had transferred more frequently were also more likely to be black, to have better-educated parents and to come from high socioeconomic status families (if financially dependent); to aspire to earn the Master's degree; and to have earned a previous post-secondary degree than the other students. However, students who had moved among four or more colleges were less likely to persist at the subject university through spring 1990 than those who had transferred less frequently.

The Four Major Multiple Transfer Paths

A series of crosstabulations were run to establish the most common enrollment\transfer patterns of multiple transfer students in the sample. While the vast majority (72 percent) of the students had attended two institutions prior to enrolling at the subject university, 21 percent had attended three institutions and

7 percent four to seven institutions. Four primary paths were discovered which accounted for 76 percent of the students' transfer movements (see Figure 1). The remaining 101 students (24 percent) could not be classified as belonging to any specific group, as there were too few subjects in any given cell for meaningful analyses to be performed. An alternate series of transfer paths was discovered when institutions to which students transferred only during the summer were excluded from the analysis. The resulting, smaller sample and transfer paths did not differ significantly on any variable from the original sample; therefore, the data were collapsed over the original sample of 424 multiple transfers and its four derivative transfer paths.

One-way analysis of variance indicated significant differences among the four major multiple transfer groups on a number of demographic, academic and interaction/attitudinal variables. These variables appear in Table 1, and include age; father's educational level; income level (for financially dependent students); high school grade point average and program; transfer hours earned at students' first and second colleges; ranking of overall experience at students' most recent college; expectations of the subject university; students' class level at the subject university; and persistence at the subject university through spring quarter, 1989.

The four major multiple transfer paths are described below.

The 4 > 2 > 4 Path

This was the most common multiple transfer path, and was followed by 28 percent of the students in the sample (n=119).

4 > 2 > 4 transfers initially attended a four-year institution; transferred to a community college; and then transferred to the subject university. Students taking the 4 > 2 > 4 path were younger than students in the other three groups, and were more likely to be single; to have attended college preparatory high school programs; to have college-educated fathers; and to persist at the subject university through spring 1990. In addition, a higher percentage of 4 > 2 > 4 transfers were white; U.S. citizens; and enrolled full-time at the subject university than students in the other groups.

The 2 > 4 > 4 Path

The second most common path was taken by 18 percent of the students in the multiple transfer sample (n=75). These students originally enrolled at a community college; transferred to a four-year institution; and then moved to the subject university. Transfers taking the 2 > 4 > 4 path were less likely than students in the other three groups to have earned a postsecondary degree prior to enrolling at the subject university. Although these transfers earned relatively high cumulative grade point averages at the subject university, they were less likely to persist through spring 1990 than the other groups.

The 2 > 2 > 4 Path

The third major path was that of attending two or more community colleges consecutively prior to enrolling at the subject university: this path was followed by 17 percent of students

in the multiple transfer sample (n=74). 2 > 2 > 4 transfers were found to differ most substantially from students in the other three groups and from the sample population in terms of their background characteristics and educational goals. Students in this group earned lower high school grades; were less likely to have attended college preparatory high schools; and were older, more likely to be married and to have earned a previous degree; and less likely to be enrolled in the subject university's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences than the other three groups. In addition, the 2 > 2 > 4 group contained a higher percentage of males, Asians, Hispanics, foreign students and Catholics than the other transfer paths. These students came from lower socioeconomic status families than the other groups, and were the least geographically mobile in their transfer patterns. Despite these disadvantages, 2 > 2 > 4 transfers earned the highest grade point averages and evidenced the highest level of institutional commitment to the subject university of the four groups.

The 4 > 4 > 4 Path

The fourth multiple transfer path, taken by 13 percent of students in the sample (n=55), was that of enrolling at three or more four-year colleges or universities consecutively (including the subject university). Transfers following the 4 > 4 > 4 path came from families with higher income levels and achieved higher high school grades and class ranks than students in the other three groups. 4 > 4 > 4 transfers were the most geographically mobile of the four groups; tended to prefer public and private colleges equally prior to enrolling at the subject univer-

sity; and moved most frequently among comprehensive colleges and universities.

Students following the 4 > 4 > 4 path were primarily traditional age; white; single and less likely to be Catholic than students taking the other transfer paths. Once at the subject university, 4 > 4 > 4 transfers were more likely to enroll in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, but earned comparatively lower cumulative grade point averages, than the other groups. These students were the most likely to state that they intended to transfer from the subject university.

4 > 4 > 4 transfers, who were least likely of the four groups to be enrolled full-time at the subject university and who earned lower grade point averages, also had comparatively lower persistence rates. This was not a surprising finding, as positive significant relationships were found to exist between multiple transfer students' cumulative grade point averages and persistence at the subject university (χ^2 (4) = 22.211, $p < .0000$), as well as between the number of hours enrolled and persistence (χ^2 (1) = 34.370, $p < .0000$).

Interinstitutional Movements of Students in the Multiple Transfer Sample

In the sample and its four derivative paths, the number of students transferring from the four-year, private sector was substantially higher than from community colleges and public four-year institutions. In addition, multiple transfers in all four groups exhibited a definite pattern of moving from smaller, more expensive, more selective institutions to larger, less expensive,

less selective colleges and universities. All of the multiple transfers in the sample eventually transferred to the subject institution, classified as a moderately selective public research university with very large (15,000 and up) enrollments and low tuition and fees (in the $1,100 to $3,000 range).

Of the multiple transfers in the sample, 192 (45 percent) began their collegiate careers at a community college. Of these students, 105 (55 percent) subsequently transferred to a four-year institution; and 87 (45 percent) moved horizontally to another community college (see Figure 1). A second group of 231 students (54 percent of the sample) originally attended a four-year college or university. Of these students, 158 (68 percent) subsequently moved to a community college, and 73 (32 percent) transferred horizontally to another four-year institution. By the time students in the sample transferred to the subject university, 243 (58 percent) had most recently attended community colleges, and 178 (42 percent) four-year institutions. Of these four-year colleges and universities, 63 percent were public, 36 percent private and 1 percent proprietary. When the Carnegie classification of these institutions was examined, 26 percent were research universities; 19 percent doctorate-granting colleges and universities; 40 percent comprehensive colleges and universities; 11 percent liberal arts colleges and 3 percent specialized institutions.

Not surprisingly, the Carnegie classification of an institution was found to have a highly significant relationship with its sector of control (χ^2 (10) = 327.908, p< .0000). For example, 99 percent of two-year colleges most recently attended by students

in the sample were public, and 100 percent of liberal arts colleges were private. Due to this relationship, students' patterns of transfer were found to vary significantly according to their multiple transfer path. Of the multiple transfer sample, 76 percent of students began their collegiate careers in the public sector and 24 percent in the private sector. Of those who started in public institutions, 61 percent of the students initially enrolled at community colleges and 39 percent at public four-year colleges or universities. Of those who began in the private sector, 96 percent were enrolled at four-year institutions. When moving from their first to their second institution, 69 percent of the students remained within the same sector of control. Of these same-sector transfers, 93 percent moved between two public colleges or universities.

When institutions were categorized by selectivity level, or average ACT scores of the entering student body at each institution, it was found that there were 268 nonselective colleges attended by students in the sample just prior to enrolling at the subject university. Of these nonselective institutions, 90 percent were community colleges. Of the four-year institutions attended by students in the sample, 16 percent were low selectivity; 59 percent moderate selectivity; and 25 percent high selectivity. Of the multiple transfer sample, 40 percent of students moved from higher selectivity to lower selectivity, lower prestige institutions; and 32 percent moved from their first institution to a second at the same selectivity level. Of these students, 85 percent transferred from one nonselective institution to another. A highly significant relationship was found to occur between in-

stitutional selectivity and sector of control (χ^2 (8) = 83.924, $p < .0000$), with private colleges more selective than their public counterparts.

For students in the sample, institutional control was found to be significantly related to tuition and fee level (χ^2 (8) = 411.699, $p < .0000$). Of the multiple transfers, 83 percent had attended inexpensive public institutions in the $0 to $3,000 tuition range just prior to transferring to the subject university. On the other hand, of the 16 percent of students who had most recently attended private institutions, 18 percent had been enrolled at colleges or universities in the moderate ($3,000 - $6,000) tuition range; 68 percent the high-cost range ($6,100 - $10,000) and 13 percent the extremely high cost range (above $10,000). Multiple transfers at all income levels were found to enroll at low-cost, public institutions. In the highest income range ($70,000 and above annually), 68 percent of survey respondents began their collegiate careers at inexpensive institutions, and 84 percent of the transfers at all income levels had attended public institutions just prior to enrolling at the subject university.

The vast majority (71 percent) of the multiple transfers had most recently attended institutions that were large (average enrollments of 8,600 to 15,000) or very large (over 15,000). Average enrollments were found to be significantly related to sector of institutional control for students in the sample (χ^2 (10) = 226.950, $p < .0000$). Of public institutions most recently attended by the multiple transfers before enrolling at the

subject university, 80 percent were in the largest two enrollment categories. Private institutions in the sample were much more disparate in terms of size, with only 27 percent in the largest two categories and 41 percent in the smallest categories. Finally, 81 percent of the multiple transfers had attended colleges or universities in the state of Illinois (where the subject university is located) prior to enrolling at the subject university; and 7 percent had most recently attended institutions elsewhere in the midwest. Of the multiple transfer sample, 67 percent of all students (n=285) remained within the same state during their first two transfer movements. Of these students, 87 percent stayed in Illinois, continuing to remain in-state when they transferred a third time to attend the subject university.

Multiple Transfer Students' Reasons for Choosing and Leaving Previous Institutions

The 424 multiple transfer students in the sample moved among a total of 305 different higher education institutions. These 305 colleges and universities represented 1,013 student transfer decisions and 1,437 enrollment decisions (including the decision to attend the subject university). No matter what transfer path they took, the students' self-reported reasons for moving among colleges were highly practical and focused on the academic system of the institution. Respondents' criteria for choosing and transferring out of specific colleges were determined primarily by institutional type (two-year or four-year) and control (public or private). In the selection of four-year colleges and universities (including the subject university), perceived

academic quality was considered the most important criterion by students in all of the multiple transfer groups, with variety of courses and programs ranked second. Perceived low quality of these academic attributes was cited as an important reason for transferring out of community colleges. Reasons for selecting community colleges emphasized affordability of tuition and convenience of campus location.

Respondents gave a much wider range of reasons for choosing and for transferring out of four-year institutions than they did for community colleges, and these reasons were highly determined by sector of institutional control. Academic quality was considered the primary rationale for selecting four-year institutions by students in the multiple transfer sample. However, affordability of tuition was rated second most important and convenience of location third in the choice of four-year public colleges and universities; while for private institutions location, variety of programs and faculty teaching ability were ranked (in descending order) after academic quality. Respondents' reasons for choosing the subject university were related to the control of the institution from which they transferred. Those transferring from public colleges cited academic quality first, followed by program variety and location; while those transferring from private colleges cited affordability of tuition first, academic quality second, location third and faculty teaching ability fourth.

Affordability of tuition was given most frequently as the primary reason for transferring out of four-year private colleges, followed by program variety, social atmosphere and aca-

demic quality. The decision to leave four-year public institutions, by contrast, was made for personal/family reasons, followed by change of residence, academic quality and program variety.

Community colleges were ranked as lower choice institutions by multiple transfers than were four-year colleges and universities. All respondents except those in the 2 > 4 > 4 group ranked the college they first attended as a higher choice institution than the second. In the 4 > 2 > 4 and 2 > 4 > 4 groups larger percentages of respondents ranked private four-year colleges as their first choice, while in the 4 > 4 > 4 group public institutions were ranked slightly higher than privates. Students in both the 4 > 2 > 4 and 2 > 4 > 4 groups reported having had better overall experiences at the community colleges than at the four-year colleges they attended. Finally, respondents in the 2 > 4 > 4 and 4 > 4 > 4 groups reported having had better overall experiences at public than at private four-year institutions.

Respondents in the sample and the four multiple transfer paths had their highest expectations of the subject university in the academic realm, and their lowest expectations in the areas of social atmosphere, attractiveness of facilities and grounds, financial aid and class size. Expectations of the groups differed significantly on the variables of academic quality and financial aid availability (see Table 1).

Discussion

Although this study examined only the behaviors of multiple transfer students who eventually enrolled at the same insti-

tution, the findings suggest that the numbers of these students may be substantial in American colleges and universities, and particularly in large, urban, public institutions. Multiple transfers matriculating at the subject university in fall 1989 comprised 21 percent of entering undergraduates and 46 percent of new transfer students. While the multiple transfers made up a large portion of institutional enrollments at the subject university, these students counted as net enrollment losses for the previous institutions they had transferred from. Implications of the multiple transfer phenomenon for individual students, institutions, and the system of higher education are therefore much greater than previously expected.

Implications Regarding the Individual Student

Results of this study suggest that multiple transfers possess - to a high degree - the demographic, academic and motivational attributes that characterize college persisters. These attributes include high levels of parental education, family income, academic ability and achievement, educational aspirations, and family support to attend college (Astin, 1975; Beal & Noel, 1980; Hossler, 1984; Lenning, 1982; Manski & Wise, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, 1983; Porter, 1989; Tinto, 1975, 1987; Velez, 1985). In addition to possessing some of these attributes to a greater degree than first-time freshmen and transfers at the subject university, it is possible that multiple transfers in the sample also have higher levels of goal commitment than these other student populations, and thus an increased potential

for attaining the baccalaureate degree. Indeed, multiple transfers may be considered the ultimate persisters, in that they make the decision to remain within the system of higher education several times over the course of their collegiate careers.

The vast majority of students in the multiple transfer sample reported that they chose - and also left - four-year colleges and universities because of the quality and/or variety of their academic programs. It is therefore speculated that many of these students transferred to obtain a better academic fit. As multiple transfers tend to exhibit low levels of institutional commitment, it is possible that they are also more sensitive than other students to any incongruencies they experience in their fit with an institution. As a result, multiple transfers may be more prone to transfer when their expectations of an institution are not met.

Transfer students have previously been accused of making ill-informed college choices which frequently result from their exaggerated, inaccurate expectations of an institution (Hossler, 1984; Noel et al., 1987; Peng, 1977). In turn, poor college choice is said to be partly responsible for any incongruencies which later arise between the student and institution (Tinto, 1987). Students in the multiple transfer sample did not appear to make "poor" college choices, nor did they seem ill-informed about the institutions they attended. Rather, these students selected institutions based on practical, specific attributes - location and cost for community colleges and perceived academic quality for four-year institutions.

Rather than resulting from poor choice, the behavior of students in the multiple transfer sample appears to be due at least in part to the students' conscious selection of lower-choice, less selective community colleges and public four-year institutions. This pattern occurred despite the findings of previous research that high socioeconomic status, high ability students prefer selective, private institutions (Davis & Van Dusen, 1975; Hearn, 1984; Zemsky & Oedel, 1983). Tinto (1987) theorized that attending lower-choice colleges would contribute to transfer behavior, a theory that the findings of this study seem to bear out. It is speculated that the multiple transfers' choices were limited by geographical and/or financial constraints, rather than by academic ability. This theory is borne out by the fact that many respondents in all four multiple transfer groups stated that they intended to transfer from their previous institution at the time of their initial enrollment, an intention shown to be a strong predictor of transfer behavior (Bean, 1982; Lenning et al., 1980; Metzner & Bean, 1987).

Students in the multiple transfer sample were bright, highly motivated individuals who did not hesitate to leave an institution when the costs of remaining were judged to outweigh the perceived benefits of transferring elsewhere. For most of these students, transferring was a positive experience in that it meant moving to an institution that was a better fit academically, socially, financially or geographically - thus enhancing their persistence within the system of higher education.

Implications for Institutions

Many of the demographic, academic and motivational attributes possessed by multiple transfers in the sample are perceived as highly desirable by colleges and universities. Their high socioeconomic statuses, excellent high school records and high academic aspirations, in particular, should make multiple transfers a sought-after target population by enrollment managers in the years ahead.

The fact that multiple transfers in the sample tended to transfer from private to public institutions is obviously disheartening news for the private sector of higher education. Private institutions are generally smaller, more academically competitive, offer a more limited selection of academic programs and charge higher tuition rates than their public counterparts. In the three multiple transfer groups in which students attended at least one four-year institution prior to enrolling at the subject university (4 > 4 > 4, 2 > 4 > 4, and 4 > 2 > 4), substartial percentages of transfers attended private colleges at some point during their collegiate careers. However, all of these students ended up at a large, urban, moderately selective public university. It is possible that, due to the limited nature of this study, a negative selection bias may have distorted the low enrollment of students in the sample at private colleges. However, the fact that transfers tend to move from private to public institutions has been documented in numerous research studies (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1986; Holmstrom & Bisconti, 1974; Knoell & Medsker, 1965; Peng, 1977; State of

Illinois Board of Higher Education, 1990; Willingham & Findyikan, 1969), which mitigates selection biases to some extent.

The tendency of financially dependent multiple transfers at all income levels to enroll at low-cost, public institutions presents a particularly problematic situation for private colleges. In order to attract and retain these students, private colleges will have to find ways to downplay or mitigate the tuition differential between themselves and public institutions and accentuate attributes such as academic quality, program variety, faculty teaching ability and campus location.

Multiple transfer respondents' answers to survey questions concerning the quality of their overall experience and the existence of supportive relationships with faculty and staff at each institution attended indicate that private colleges have some work to do in these areas, as well. Of the respondents, students in the 4 > 4 > 4 and 2 > 4 > 4 groups reported having had more positive overall experiences at public than at private four-year institutions. In addition, multiple transfer students in the 4 > 4 > 4 group gave higher choice rankings to public than to private colleges and universities. Finally, 2 > 4 > 4 respondents indicated that they had enjoyed more supportive relationships with faculty or staff members at four-year public institutions than at private ones.

A particularly surprising finding of the study was the extent to which multiple transfer students in the sample moved among community colleges - both prior to and following their enrollment at four-year institutions. Students taking three of the four major paths transferred to or from a community college at

some point during their collegiate careers, thus establishing community college attendance as typical of multiple transfer behavior. Another interesting discovery was the fact that, in the multiple transfer groups in which students attended both two-year and four-year institutions (the 2 > 4 > 4 and 4 > 2 > 4 paths), survey respondents reported having had better overall experiences at the community colleges. In addition, 4 > 2 > 4 transfers indicated that they had enjoyed more supportive relationships with members of the faculty or staff at the community colleges than at four-year institutions. Since students' overall experiences at an institution have been shown to be more important than their background characteristics in determining transfer behavior (Holmstrom & Bisconti, 1974; Volkwein et al., 1986), the fact that community colleges received consistently higher ratings in this area bodes poorly for four-year institutions (and particularly for private colleges, which have established reputations for enhancing students' on-campus experiences).

As the low tuition cost, convenient class schedules and central locations of community colleges make them more acceptable alternatives to four-year institutions, it is predicted that students will transfer back and forth between the two- and four-year sectors with increasing frequency in the years ahead. As competition between these sectors increases, community colleges will pose an increasingly formidable challenge to four-year colleges and universities for the first two years of a student's undergraduate education.

Significance of the Study

The multiple transfer phenomenon may cause institutions to reexamine existing models of student persistence, as well as their curricular structures. Individual colleges and universities have traditionally failed to distinguish between attrition and transfer, regarding both behaviors as highly undesirable in that they result in increased costs and decreased tuition revenues. However, findings from this study indicate that institutions should separate transfers from dropouts instead of lumping them together into aggregate data. Results of this study and others show that transfers have a great deal more in common with persisters than they do with dropouts (Carroll, 1989; Holmstrom & Bisconti, 1974; Lee & Frank, 1990; Velez & Javalgi, 1987; Wisner, 1984). In this regard, it is important for institutions to understand that what is beneficial for them (e.g., retaining a student to graduation) may not ultimately be beneficial for the student, and that transferring to improve student-institution fit can increase the likelihood that an individual will attain a college degree. Although multiple transfers may leave an institution in search of a better fit, other multiple transfers will likely enroll at that same institution to take their place.

The fact that multiple transfers move among so many institutions over the course of their collegiate careers leads to a concern for curricular accountability. While multiple transfers undoubtedly accumulate the credit hours and earn the academic credentials necessary to receive a college degree, the possibility that they will have a coherent and unified educational

experience is small. Multiple transfers' frequent movements from college to college preclude the chance that any one institution's curriculum will have a significant impact. The multiple transfer phenomenon may therefore be an impetus to the development of course-by-course general education curricula which are largely distributive in nature, as opposed to those which currently emphasize a cohesive, four-year sequence. Such curricula would also be beneficial to students who "stop out" and to those who change their academic field of concentration. Even though these students attend only one college, they tend to receive disjointed educational experiences which resemble those of multiple transfers.

This study examined a sample of students from a population that has not been subject to previous research - the multiple transfer population. Several significant findings emerged from the data analyses, suggesting that the background characteristics, educational aspirations and interinstitutional movements of multiple transfer students are areas worthy of future research. Further research should include replicating this study at other four-year institutions (both public and private), at the community college level, and at the national level (using data from the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 and the High School and Beyond study). The extent to which multiple transfers differ from first-time freshmen and transfers in background characteristics, academic performance, educational aspirations, institutional commitment and systemic persistence should be examined.

Findings of this study also indicated several significant

demographic, academic and motivational differences among students taking the four major multiple transfer paths. The 2 > 2 > 4 and 4 > 4 > 4 groups, in particular, differed from one another and from the other two groups. Further data analysis will examine these differences using multivariate statistics, and a predictive model will be built which will be tested using discriminant analysis.

The 424 multiple transfers in the sample collectively made 1,013 decisions to transfer and 1,437 decisions to enroll at various institutions by the time they entered the subject university. It would be valuable to examine these transfer and choice decisions in more depth to discover the ways in which they differ from the decisions of first-time freshmen and transfers. In particular, the role of perceived academic quality should be looked at more closely, since it appears to affect multiple transfers' choice and withdrawal behaviors.

It is hypothesized that the choice process of multiple transfers is more sophisticated than that of other students, and that multiple transfers include fewer institutions in their choice sets due to geographical and/or financial constraints. It is further theorized that the choice process evolves with each multiple transfer movement as students develop a "learning curve" regarding the selection of various types of institutions. It is possible that further research on the multiple transfer population will facilitate the development of more comprehensive, systemic theories of college choice and persistence.

FIG. 1 Multiple transfer paths of the sample population

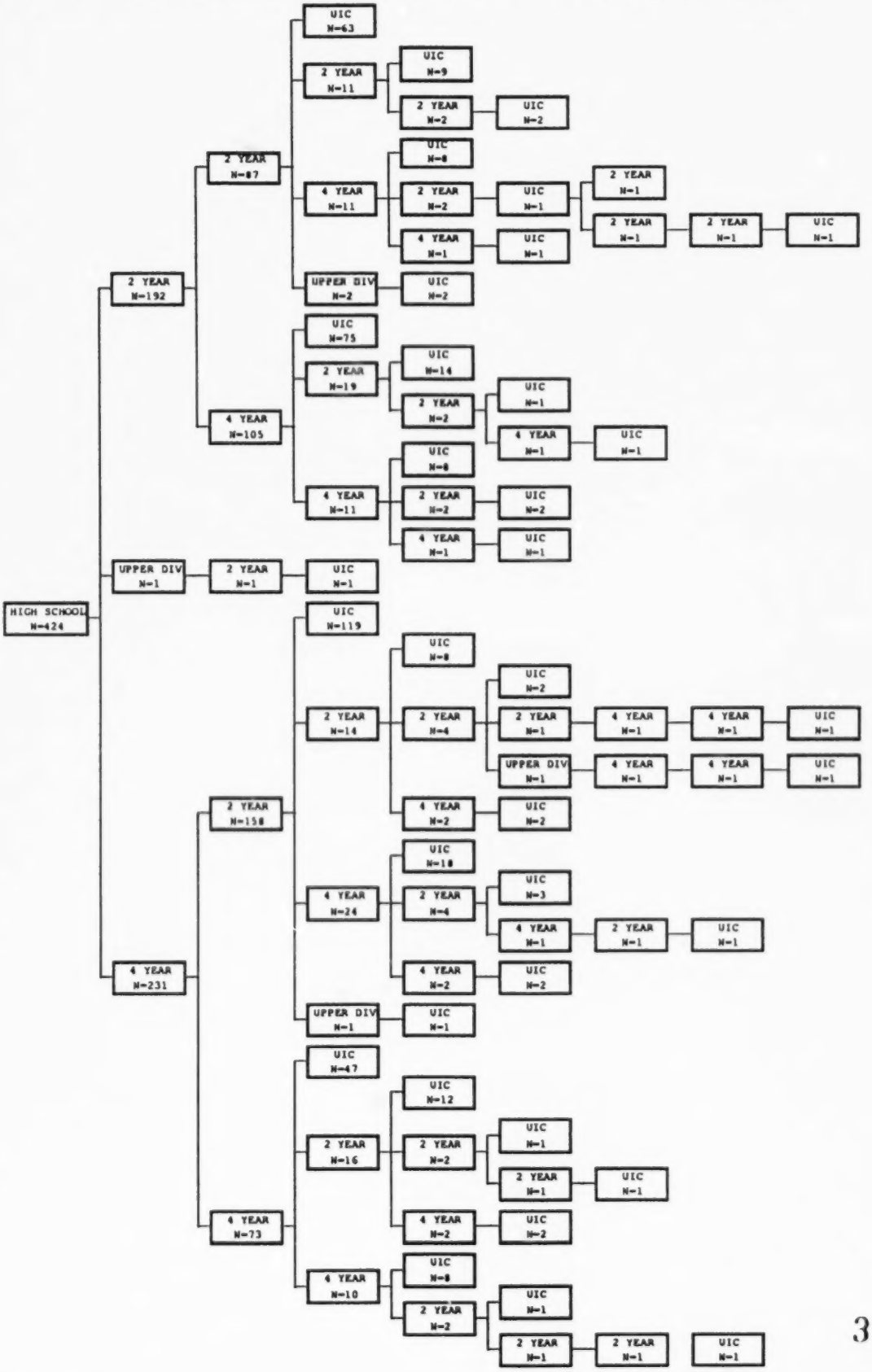

TABLE 1
SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES
ACCORDING TO TRANSFER PATH

	4>2>4 PATH (N=119)		2>4>4 PATH (N=75)		2>2>4 PATH (N=74)		4>4>4 PATH (N=55)	
AGE	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
		*		*		*		
18-22	74	(88)	68	(51)	35	(24)	58	(32)
23-28	20	(24)	24	(18)	40	(29)	26	(14)
29-33	3	(4)	7	(5)	17	(12)	9	(5)
34-38	1	(1)	1	(1)	6	(4)	2	(1)
OVER 38	2	(2)	--		3	(2)	5	(3)
TOTAL		(119)		(75)		(71)		(55)

F (3, 317) = 10.045, p < .0000.

FATHER'S EDUCATION	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
		*				*		
NO COLLEGE	30	(23)	38	(19)	56	(23)	39	(13)
SOME COLLEGE	16	(12)	24	(12)	22	(9)	15	(5)
COLLEGE DEGREE	54	(41)	38	(19)	22	(9)	45	(15)
TOTAL		(76)		(50)		(41)		(33)

F (3, 197) = 3.468, p < .0172.

MARITAL STATUS	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
		*				*		
SINGLE	92	(72)	90	(46)	73	(32)	85	(28)
MARRIED	6	(5)	6	(3)	20	(9)	15	(5)
DIVORCED	1	(1)	4	(2)	7	(3)	--	
TOTAL		(78)		(51)		(44)		(33)

F (3, 202) = 2.841, p < .0389.

HIGH SCHOOL GPA	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
						*		*
A- to A	20	(16)	8	(4)	5	(2)	33	(11)
B to B-	26	(20)	28	(14)	31	(13)	24	(8)
B- to B	23	(18)	31	(16)	12	(5)	24	(8)
C to B-	20	(16)	22	(11)	33	(14)	12	(4)
C- to C	9	(7)	10	(5)	10	(4)	3	(1)
D to C-	1	(1)	2	(1)	2	(1)	3	(1)
BELOW D	--		--		5	(2)	--	
TOTAL		(78)		(51)		(41)		(33)

F (3, 201) = 3.576 p < .0149.

(TABLE 1, CONTINUED)

	4>2>4 PATH (N=119)		2>4>4 PATH (N=75)		2>2>4 PATH (N=74)		4>4>4 PATH (N=55)	
HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
COLLEGE PREP.	91 *	(70)	82 *	(42)	57 *	(24)	84 *	(26)
VO/TECH.	4	(3)	6	(3)	14	(6)	6	(2)
BUSINESS/ COMMERCIAL	3	(2)	6	(3)	7	(3)	--	
OTHER	3	(2)	6	(3)	21	(9)	10	(3)
TOTAL		(77)		(51)		(42)		(31)

F (3,198) = 7.599, p < .0001.

INCOME (IF DEPENDENT)	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
< $10,000	9 *	(4)	7	(2)	25 *	(3)	14 *	(3)
$10-$19,999	4	(2)	10	(3)	--		5	(1)
$20-$29,999	14	(6)	21	(6)	25	(3)	5	(1)
$30-$39,999	11	(5)	7	(2)	--		14	(3)
$40-$49,999	11	(5)	24	(7)	25	(3)	5	(1)
$50-$59,999	16	(7)	21	(6)	--		5	(1)
$60-$69,999	14	(6)	3	(1)	--		5	(1)
> $70,000	20	(9)	7	(2)	25	(3)	47	(10)
TOTAL		(44)		(29)		(12)		(21)

F (3,194) = 5.689, p < .0009.

PREVIOUS DEGREE	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
ASSOCIATE'S	27 *	(21)	14 *	(7)	56 *	(25)	6 *	(2)
NO DEGREE	72	(57)	86	(45)	38	(17)	79	(26)
OTHER DEGREE	1	(1)	--		7	(3)	14	(5)
TOTAL		(79)		(52)		(45)		(33)

F (3,204) = 12.558, p < 0000.

FIRST COLLEGE TRANSFER HRS.	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
0 - 11	3	(3)	36	(25)	23	(16)	14	(7)
12 - 30	27	(29)	23	(16)	31	(22)	28	(14)
31 - 60	41	(44)	15	(10)	20	(14)	22	(11)
61 - 90	22	(24)	15	(10)	13	(9)	16	(8)
91 - 120	4	(4)	12	(8)	11	(8)	16	(8)
> 120	3	(3)	--		1	(1)	4	(2)
TOTAL		(107)		(69)		(73)		(50)

F (3, 303) = 4.339, p < .0052.

(TABLE 1, CONTINUED)

	4>2>4 PATH (N=119)		2>4>4 PATH (N=75)		2>2>4 PATH (N=74)		4>4>4 PATH (N=55)	
SECOND COLLEGE TRANSFER HRS.	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
	*				*			
0-11	26	(30)	4	(3)	8	(6)	14	(7)
12-30	20	(23)	21	(15)	24	(17)	35	(17)
31-60	21	(24)	31	(22)	28	(20)	27	(13)
61-90	19	(22)	28	(20)	24	(17)	18	(9)
91-120	12	(14)	10	(7)	11	(8)	2	(1)
> 120	1	(1)	7	(5)	6	(4)	4	(2)
TOTAL		(119)		(75)		(72)		(49)

F (3, 292) = 3.018, p < .0302.

OVERALL EXPERIENCE 2ND COLLEGE	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
	*		*		*		*	
EXTREMELY POSITIVE	25	(17)	8	(4)	24	(10)	32	(10)
POSITIVE	44	(30)	44	(23)	59	(24)	42	(13)
AVERAGE	30	(21)	25	(13)	17	(7)	16	(5)
NEGATIVE	--		19	(10)	--		7	(2)
EXTREMELY NEGATIVE	1	(1)	4	(2)	--		3	(1)
TOTAL		(69)		(52)		(41)		(31)

F (3, 189) = 6.845 p < .0002.

CLASS	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
FRESHMAN	10	(12)	5	(4)	8	(6)	11	(6)
SOPHOMORE	45	(54)	33	(25)	30	(22)	29	(16)
JUNIOR	37	(44)	44	(33)	51	(38)	40	(22)
SENIOR	8	(9)	17	(13)	11	(8)	20	(11)
TOTAL		(119)		(75)		(74)		(55)

F (3, 318) = 2.897, p < .0353.

PERSISTENCE THROUGH SPRING 1990	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
	*				*			
ENROLLED	87	(103)	69	(52)	76	(56)	74	(41)
NOT ENROLLED	13	(16)	31	(23)	24	(18)	26	(14)
TOTAL		(119)		(75)		(74)		(55)

F (3, 318) = 3.004, p < .0306.

(TABLE 1, CONTINUED)

	4>2>4 PATH (N=119)		2>4>4 PATH (N=75)		2>2>4 PATH (N=74)		4>4>4 PATH (N=55)	
EXPECTATIONS OF ACADEMIC QUALITY	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
EXTREMELY LOW	--		2 *	(1)	2 *	(1)	--	
LOW	1	(1)	--		--		3	(1)
NEUTRAL	14	(11)	25	(13)	7	(3)	24	(8)
HIGH	43	(34)	50	(26)	36	(16)	52	(17)
EXTREMELY HIGH	42	(33)	23	(12)	54	(24)	21	(7)
TOTAL		(79)		(52)		(44)		(33)

F (3, 204) = 4.599, p < .0039.

EXPECTATIONS OF FINANCIAL AID	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
EXTREMELY LOW	22	(17)	27	(14)	16	(7)	16	(5)
LOW	21	(16)	14	(7)	5	(2)	13	(4)
NEUTRAL	28	(22)	29	(15)	35	(15)	9	(3)
HIGH	9	(7)	17	(9)	12	(5)	31	(10)
EXTREMELY HIGH	20	(16)	14	(7)	33	(14)	31	(10)
TOTAL		(78)		(52)		(43)		(32)

F (3, 202) = 3.089, p < .0282.

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* Denotes pairs of groups significantly different at the 0.050 level (using the Scheffe procedure).

Note: percentages are rounded to the nearest full percent.

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